

# Los Angeles Times

## Los Angeles hopes to make a fashion statement

A logo has been created for items designed and made in the city in hopes it will raise L.A.'s profile in the apparel industry. But questions remain.



Initial guidelines dictate that apparel companies using the logo be headquartered within L.A. city limits. (October 17, 2012)



Mayor unveils winning 'Designed/Made in L.A.' logo

By Adam Tschorn and Booth Moore Los Angeles Times

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What does the rest of the world picture when it thinks of Los Angeles? Hollywood. Celebrities. Palm trees. Perfect weather.

Fashion capital? Not so much.

Yes, our celebrities are certainly well-dressed. Yes, the L.A. area is the mecca of youth culture, the surf-skate industries and the premium denim scene. It is also home to many of the midrange fashion labels that fill the racks of department stores, including David Meister, Tadashi Shoji, Karen Kane, BCBG, Guess and Robert Rodriguez. There's mass manufacturing, T-shirts (American Apparel) and fast fashion (Forever 21). On the other end of the spectrum is an impressive high-end designer culture that includes Monique Lhuillier and Rodarte.

And yet, L.A.'s fashion scene does not have the same cachet as New York.

Local designers and organizers have struggled for years to pull together a cohesive fashion week, but their goal remains elusive. "Fashion Week" consists of a crazy-quilt of events stretching across three weeks twice a year.

Now Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa — who says the city's contributions to apparel design and manufacture should be as instantly recognizable as its flora and famous folk — is weighing in. The goal? To brand Los Angeles as a city perfectly positioned to take fashion production seamlessly from mood board to shipboard and raise the city's apparel manufacturing profile overseas.

The first step toward that goal came Monday, when the mayor unveiled a new "Designed/Made in Los Angeles" garment hangtag logo; versions of it could appear on clothing that is designed or manufactured in L.A. within a couple of months.

"With 10,000 fashion-related companies employing 100,000 people, our city has the tools to get you from pattern design to movie premiere," the mayor said during a news conference at the Cooper Design Space in downtown L.A.'s fashion district. "The goal of the Designed/Made in Los Angeles initiative is to help this industry continue to grow and thrive."

The mayor's initiative was announced on the first day of Los Angeles market week, when buyers traditionally flock to showrooms to place spring orders. It comes during a time when consumers are more conscientious than ever about the provenance of the things they consume, such as the sustainable line-and-pole-caught tuna on their dinner plates or the iPhone 5s in their pockets. The buy local trend, tied in part to labor and environmental abuses abroad, is also tied to job growth in the U.S. In the last few months, fashion brands big and small, including Brooks Brothers and Will Leather Goods' flagship store in Venice, have been using "Made in America" as a selling point.

Can something similar happen in Los Angeles?

The logo hangtags, Villaraigosa said, will go a long way toward establishing L.A. as a consistent and memorable "brand."

The initiative is part of a larger, five-pronged program conceived by the mayor to generate support for L.A. fashion labels to exhibit at major trade shows, create an online resource guide to local manufacturing, identify export opportunities for fashion brands and promote workforce development.

Funding will come from a variety of sources, according to the mayor's office, but officials declined to detail specifics. What is known is that the hangtag logo program will be the responsibility of the Los Angeles Regional Export Council, a group that relies on both public and private funding.

So far, 19 local designers and manufacturers, including American Apparel, have given a thumbs up to the effort. Marty Bailey, the company's chief manufacturing officer who was standing next to Villaraigosa during Monday's announcement, said American Apparel has long included the words "made in downtown L.A." on its hangtags, and that now, more than ever, consumers are paying attention. But, he cautions, "Made in Los Angeles or made in the USA might be a deciding factor in selling a garment the first time, but it's going to be ... the product itself that's going to sell it the second time."

Clayton and Flavie Webster, who design the fledgling luxury leather line Cerre, with a store and atelier on Melrose Avenue, are also supporting the initiative.

"This is a good manufacturing and production city. Hedi Slimane [of Yves Saint Laurent] is moving his design team right down the street from our store," Clayton said. "This [initiative] will help solidify momentum for producing and designing here. L.A. should be known as a great city to produce a fashion line."

And promoting the fact that something is made here can affect the bottom line, he said.

"We do get customers who say, 'I was looking at a jacket at Barneys, but I realized it was \$3,000 and made in China.' There is a conscious customer, especially in the luxury market, who cares about where things are made. Made in L.A., New York or made in the USA is a stamp of approval that you are not abusing anyone and that there is fairness in the costing."

But others aren't so sure what the logo will mean.

"I will look into it," said Rozae Nichols, who designs and manufactures 100% of her Clover Canyon line in Los Angeles and has been a big proponent of manufacturing locally in the nearly two decades she has been in the apparel business here. "I'm all for raising awareness for the community.... But I don't know what all the mayor's intentions are. I'm sure he's as concerned as anyone about fair labor policies. But 'Made in L.A.' is not a magic bullet that signifies everything is OK just because it's made here. Just like 'Made in China' isn't necessarily always a bad thing."

"Our hangtags for garments made here already say 'Made in California,'" said Trina Turk, who manufactures 40% of her women's line and 90% of her men's line in Los Angeles. "Whether our customers would buy those garments over another, I'm doubtful. I hate to say it, but I think our customer cares more about how she looks and feels in something."

"Because of the cost of sewing labor, the things we end up making in L.A. are the simpler silhouettes," Turk said. "If anything is highly detailed or embellished, it has to go overseas because it's not going to work financially to make it here. We would no longer be at a contemporary price point."

Then there are the hangtags themselves, and to what exactly "made in L.A." and "designed in L.A." applies. According to a representative for the mayor's office (who emphasizes that specific criteria are still being "fleshed out"), initial guidelines for use of the logo require that a company be physically headquartered within Los Angeles city limits.

Although that would include many brands instantly associated with Los Angeles' style scene, it would exclude many of the premium denim brands that have helped put L.A. on the fashion map but are located in neighboring Vernon, Culver City or elsewhere. Nor would it allow San Francisco-based Gap to use the logo on its denim, even though its denim design studio is located in downtown L.A.

For some smaller designers like Inka Sherman, whose 2-year-old ISM Mode women's label is based in L.A., the benefit of a consistent "Made in L.A." brand identity takes a back seat to more practical considerations.

"I'm not entirely sure yet if there's anything in it for me as a smaller designer," said Sherman, who attended the mayor's news conference. "It would help if there was something practical in it for us. A website including everybody who uses the logo, so if someone was looking specifically for a made-in-Los Angeles designer they could easily find one ... or coordinated marketing like the Got Milk? campaign, where there's some advertising muscle behind it."

Sherman also wonders what sort of consistent brand message "Designed/Made in Los Angeles" actually is. "Will the 'Made in L.A. logo' eventually end up being a mark of a certain quality or greatness? I just don't know if that's going to happen," she said. "Just look at all the brands that are located in Los Angeles, it's such a range and mix of stuff."

But maybe the size and diversity of the industry here is the message.

When asked specifically what he wants the logo to represent when someone notices it dangling from a garment or pasted at the bottom of a homepage, Villaraigosa said, "We want designers to say: 'This is where we'll be, because this is where the manufacturing is, this is where the supply chain is, and this is where [goods] are exported from' — it's all integrated."

In other words, a tiny "Open for Business" sign.

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